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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 JAKARTA 013419

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [ID](#)
SUBJECT: PKS SUFFERS ELECTORAL SETBACK

REF: A. JAKARTA 11376 (JAKARTA GOVERNOR'S RACE)
[1](#)B. JAKARTA 13361 (MEGAWATI SURVEYS INDONESIA)
[1](#)C. JAKARTA 06017 (LOCALIZED SHARIAH LAW)

Classified By: Classified by Political Officer Eric W. Kneedler, reason
1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The ascendant Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) fell just short in its attempt to register a defining victory in the November 26 Banten provincial governor's race. The Banten Electoral Commission certified the election results on December 1 and declared Golkar's Ratu Atut Chosiyah the winner over PKS legislator Zulkieflimansyah by a margin of 40.2 percent to 32.9 percent. By fighting off a surprisingly strong challenge from Zulkieflimansyah and two less competitive candidates, Ratu Atut Chosiyah became Indonesia's first directly elected female governor. In what might serve as a harbinger of future selective cooperation between Indonesia's two largest secular parties, the Indonesian Democratic Party - Struggle (PDI-P) joined forces with Golkar to back Chosiyah's candidacy and keep the strategic Banten governorship out of PKS hands. PKS has trumpeted Zulkieflimansyah's strong showing as a victory for the party given the low expectations going into the race and the severe disparity in resources between PKS and the competing parties.
End Summary.

THE ELECTION

[1](#)2. (C) The election derived most of its significance from the fact that Banten borders the capital city of Jakarta and was therefore viewed by some as a bellwether for next year's more coveted prize: the Jakarta governorship (Ref A). Going into the election, conventional wisdom held that Golkar and PDI-P were the two strongest parties in the province, an impression that was bolstered by the fact that they possessed the highest number of seats in the provincial legislature, with 16 and 12 seats respectively. PKS was viewed as the third strongest party with 11 seats, and the Democratic Party (PD) followed with 8. Other, less tangible indicators suggested that Banten, which only became a province in 2000, was becoming more conservative and that a portion of the electorate might opt to repudiate the secular parties in favor of an Islamist party like PKS. Tangerang, Banten's most populous municipality, was in some ways a case study for this phenomenon. In 2005, Tangerang legislators pushed through a series of aggressive "anti-immorality" regulations which, among other things, banned public kissing and the sale of alcohol everywhere but in star-rated hotels (Ref C).

13. (C) Ratu Atut Chosiyah served as the interim Governor of Banten throughout the campaign and was considered a prohibitive favorite every step of the way. Not only did she enjoy all the trappings of incumbency, but the Golkar politician also managed to secure the endorsement of PDI-P, thereby locking up the financial and logistical support of Indonesia's two largest and most formidable political parties. Chosiyah also enjoyed celebrity status for her role as "Founding Mother" of Banten, a status she was accorded after helping to split Banten away from West Java to form the independent province of Banten. In addition to Zulkieflimansyah, Chosiyah also faced Tryana Sjam'un from the United Development Party (PPP) and Irsjad Djuwaeli, who enjoyed the support of both PD and the National Awakening Party (PKB).

14. (C) In the event, Chosiyah registered a relatively comfortable victory despite a strong performance by Zulkieflimansyah and PKS. Not only did she become Indonesia's first directly elected Governor, but she also became the highest ranking directly elected female official in Indonesian history. Voting observers reported the November 26 election took place without incident, though voter turnout was very low by Indonesian standards - 58% according to the Banten Electoral Commission (KPUD). The official results, according to KPUD:

Ratu Atut Chosiyah (Golkar-PDI-P).....40.2%
Zulkieflimansyah (PKS).....32.9%
Tryana Sjam'un (PPP).....22.7%
Irsjad Djuwaeli (PD-PKB).....4.1%

PKS AND ITS CANDIDATE LOSE, BUT BOTH DECLARE VICTORY

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15. (C) Zulkieflimansyah was conflicted about his candidacy at the outset. In late August, just before he officially threw his hat in the ring, he admitted to us that his primary concern about entering the race was that "he might actually win." He was ambivalent at best even after officially becoming a candidate, and did not hesitate to admit that the challenges he could face as governor would far surpass the hurdles he encountered as a member of Parliament. In addition to his misgivings about the challenges of governing the province, he also seemed to recognize that he was embarking on a "mission impossible" of sorts; he knew his odds of victory were exceedingly slim. One of Zulkieflimansyah's best friends, fellow PKS legislator Fahri Hamzah confided to us on the eve of the election that ultimately Zulkieflimansyah opted to run out of fealty to his party and the conviction that he would not be damaged politically if he lost an "un-winnable" race. In the unlikely event of victory, Fahri continued, Zulkieflimansyah knew that the political dividends would be enormous and that he would immediately be catapulted onto a short list of national political icons.

16. (C) On November 27, shortly after exit polling and quick counts began to suggest Zulkieflimansyah's gubernatorial bid fell short, the PKS machine started to spin the results, with more than a little credibility, as a victory for the party. Party luminaries were quick to point out that Zulkieflimansyah only entered the race in September, that he was severely outgunned by all the other candidates in the resource war, and that his opponent was an incumbent with the backing of Indonesia's two biggest parties. When we talked with Zulkieflimansyah himself on November 28, he stuck to those same talking points and claimed that PKS would be able to get "considerable mileage" from its strong showing.

GOLKAR/PDI-P: STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

17. (C) Ratu Atut Chosiyah may have recorded her most

impressive victory before the general election, when she beat Indonesian actress Marissa Hague and a cast of other PDI-P cadres to secure the nomination of PDI-P's Banten chapter (Note: Marissa subsequently defected from PDI-P and ran as Zulkieflimansyah's running mate). By locking up both Golkar and PDI-P's support, she created an air of inevitability about her candidacy that muted coverage of the race and ultimately probably affected voter turnout as well.

18. (C) PDI-P's endorsement was interpreted by the Indonesian media and the political elite in one of two ways, either as: a) a pragmatic acknowledgment of the fact that PDI-P did not have the firepower to challenge Ratu Atut Chosiyah, or b) a selfless act of nationalism designed to deny PKS a strategic foothold on Jakarta's doorstep. For her part, former President Megawati Soekarnoputri endorsed the second of these two explanations in a recent meeting with the Ambassador (Ref B). The most plausible explanation for the alliance probably lies somewhere in the middle. The party likely feared that it would field a candidate that was not strong enough to win, but strong enough to pull voters away from Chosiyah and dilute the secular vote to the point that PKS might win. Ultimately the thought of a PKS victory would have proven much less palatable to PDI-P decision makers than the prospect of a marriage of convenience with Golkar.

COMMENT

19. (C) PKS and Zulkieflimansyah recorded a moral victory of sorts by turning in its strongest ever performance in a provincial election and standing toe to toe with the Golkar/PDI-P alliance. The party masterfully lowered expectations going into the race by downplaying its chances and assuming a stealthy, below the radar approach to the campaign. On the other hand, PKS lost an election in an increasingly conservative province and failed to capitalize on an opportunity to steal a crucial governor's office from Indonesia's established political heavyweights. It is one thing to lower expectations and quite another to fail to mount the best possible campaign. Winning the election would have been difficult under the best of circumstances, but the party unnecessarily handicapped itself by nominating its candidate too late in the game, neglecting to dedicate the resources required to win, and perhaps even underestimating its own competitiveness.

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PASCOE